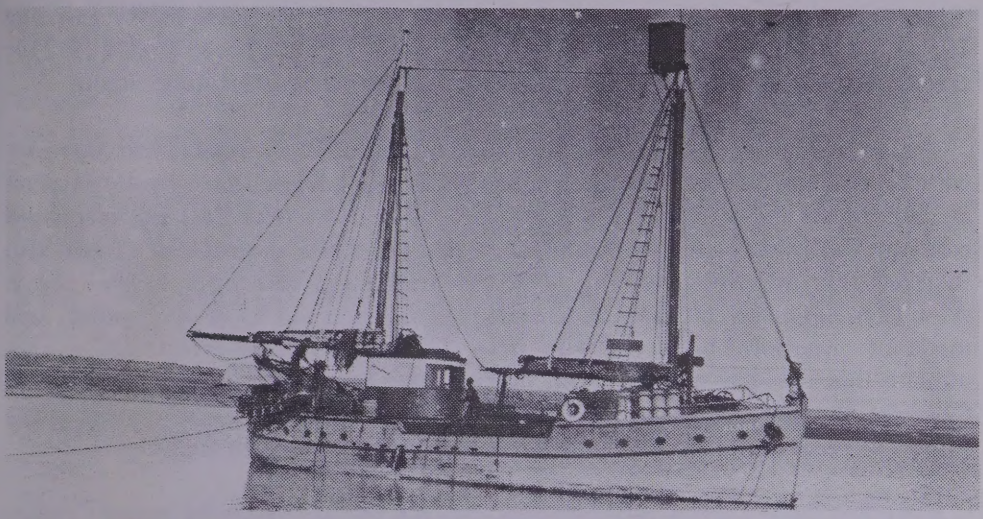

C.G.S. ALASKA, purchased at Nome, Alaska to transport supplies for the Canadian Arctic Expedition in 1913. (Photo by Dr. R.M. Anderson, courtesy of National Museums of Canada).

C.G.S. ALASKA, 1913-14

by David R. Gray

To supplement the story of the Canadian Arctic Expedition under V. Stefansson in the vessel KARLUK (BULLETIN Fall 1978 edition), Mr. Gray has prepared a two-part account of the work of the scientific party under Dr. R.M. Anderson and of the supply vessels purchased to support the operation. Editor.

When the Canadian Arctic Expedition was formally taken over by the Dominion Government in February 1913, the scientific objectives of the expedition were greatly expanded. The Southern Party, under Dr. R.M. Anderson, was to investigate the geology and geography of the western Canadian Arctic coast as well as the anthropology and biology of the region. The resulting increase in staff and equipment was the reason for the purchase in Nome, Alaska, of additional vessels to assist KARLUK in transporting men and supplies to their area of operations in the Beaufort Sea and Coronation Gulf.

The tragic story of KARLUK is well known, as are the exploits of Stefansson and the Northern Party. Unfortunately, the story of the successful scientific explorations of the Southern Party have not received the same attention. The schooner ALASKA was one of six ships purchased during the expedition and the only one that served from start to finish. The story of her four years with the expedition is outlined in the expedition reports but comes to life in the daily journal of Dr. Anderson, Zoologist with the Geological Survey of Canada, who directed her Canadian career.

Most members of both the Northern and Southern Parties of the expedition, with a large part of the equipment and supplies, sailed from H.M.C. Dockyard at Esquimalt, B.C. on June 17, 1913, in KARLUK. Anderson and additional supplies travelled from Seattle to Nome in the Alaska Steamship Company's S.S. VICTORIA. There the

ALASKA, a 50 ton wooden auxiliary schooner with a 50 horse-power gasolene engine, was purchased for the use of the Southern Party. She had been built in 1912 for the Bering Sea trade and to carry the United States mail to Kotzebue Sound.

C.G.S. ALASKA left Nome on July 19 and arrived at Teller, Alaska five days later with her engine in bad shape. The departure of KARLUK and the expedition's other auxiliary schooner, MARY SACHS, was delayed so that KARLUK's engineer could assist in dismantling and overhauling ALASKA's engine. A propeller change also required that ALASKA be unloaded and hauled up, causing a further delay. ALASKA finally got away on August 11, but was plagued by engine trouble, and made little headway under sail. "August 14. Captain (Nahmens) threatened . . . that unless engines could be made to work . . . he would head ship into Kotzebue Sound and throw up the job". Fortunately for the expedition the problem -- salt water in the starboard fuel tank -- was solved and "after that the engine ran smoothly".

Rounding Point Barrow on August 20, they ran into the first solid ice and shortly, in trying to go inside of the grounded cakes, ran firmly aground. this was the first of many groundings in the shallow, uncharted waters. The expedition's frustrated marine biologist Johansen was soon "growling because manual labor interferes with his collecting". Nine vessels attempting to reach Herschel Island in 1913 were caught by the severe ice conditions, including KARLUK, ALASKA, and MARY SACHS. Two were crushed and sank; the gas schooner ELIVRA in October, 1913, and KARLUK which drifted west and sank northeast of Wrangell Island in January, 1914. By creeping slowly along the shore, moving ahead a little whenever the wind and tide loosened and shifted the ice, ALASKA and MARY SACHS succeeded in getting as far as Collinson Point on the north coast of Alaska, about ninety miles west of the Alaska-Yukon boundary. "September 10. Decided in conference . . . to winter here where schooners can be hauled up safely". But ALASKA was caught in heavy slush ice and frozen in before she could be hauled up on the beach.

The winter at Collinson Point was spent in preparation for the coming explorations. The ships' crews joined the scientists on hunting and collecting trips, visits to the other frozen-in ships down the coast, and learning to handle the teams of dogs to be used on the spring surveys. Christmas festivities included gramophone music, moving pictures, and goodies from a "Christmas Box presented by the ladies of Victoria, B.C.". It was not until the 7th of July 1914 that ALASKA was again floating free in the harbour. Following more repairs to the propellor, ALASKA left Collinson Point on July 25, the first day that the ice moved off the beach far enough to let them out of the harbour. After more delays, this time due to thick ice along the shores, ALASKA finally reached Herschel Island on August 5, just ahead of MARY SACHS. These expedition vessels were the first to come into Canadian waters in the western Arctic flying the Canadian flag. At Herschel Island supplies brought in by whaler were loaded on board but departure was again delayed by a storm during which three schooners dragged anchors and went on the beach. This time ALASKA's engine worked just long enough to keep her off.

MARY SACHS left Herschel Island ahead of ALASKA, and sailed north towards Banks Island to support Stefansson and the Northern Party. ALASKA sailed east

from Herschel Island on August 17, and was held up only a little by heavy ice in Mackenzie Bay. Finally encountering smooth sailing in ice-free summer seas, the ALASKA reached Bernard Harbour, Dolphin and Union Strait, on the evening of August 24. This was the first good harbour for nearly 200 miles east of Darnley Bay, and the base station of the Southern Party from August 1914 to July 1916.

After unloading the cargo of the ALASKA it was necessary once again to haul her up on the beach, this time to repair a broken propellor. "Mr Blue (engineer) nearly froze doing it as propellor was under water, and he had to work in about three feet of water and stoop down until his chin was submerged. Worked all forenoon trying to get ALASK out of the mud in which she had settled and stuck fast".

Dr. Anderson started west with ALASKA again on September 6, with the intention of getting some driftwood timber from farther west, as well as some more coal from a cache at Baillie Island. The members of the scientific staff, with Eskimo assistants, were left at Bernard Harbour to put up winter quarters. Finding weather conditions very favourable at Baillie Island, and no ice reported to the west, Anderson decided to take ALASKA on to Herschel Island; to bring east coal and oil, and additional supplies which had been expected to arrived during the summer. ALASKA reached Herschel Island again Setember 11, and after loading some stores from the reserve stock, but without the new shipment, started east again two days later. ALASKA arrived back at Baillie Island on the night of September 14, in the midst of a rising gale, heavy snow storm, and spray freezing on the decks and rigging. The storm, the worst of the season, kept rising for the next two days and did not abate until noon of September 19. There was a very high storm tide, and the fuel drums and coal sacks which had been landed on the beach in the summer were half buried by the sand washed up. Precious hours were spent digging them out. Quantities of large ice had come in during the big storm, but they still tried to go out on the morning of September 20. In trying to turn around in the narrow anchorage, the bow of ALASKA ran lightly around in the mud. With the falling of the westerly wind, the storm tide fell rapidly and attempts to kedge her off were unsuccessful. ALASKA was soon settled hard aground. The whole cargo had to be unloaded and the schooner finally floated free four days later.

"As the nights are very dark now, with the moon gone and more or less ice floating in, it is a precarious matter to sail at night now, and as young ice is forming pretty thick and slushy at times now, decided to stay here". Facing the possibility of being caught by winter before reaching the safety of Bernard Harbour, Anderson decided to put the ship into winter quarters behind the end of the Cape Bathurst sandspit. The ALASKA had to go to Herschel Island in the summer of 1915 for supplies and mail anyway, and had a better chance of getting out early from Baillie Island than from farther east. There were enough supplies on the ALASKA for several men to remain as ship-keepers during the winter. Two fresh whale carcasses on the beach near the ship provided an abundance of dog-food and also attracted a number of polar bears and many arctic foxes to the vicinity.

During the winter, following Anderson's departure by dog team to Bernard Harbour, the ship-keepers hunted seals and polar bears, retaining the skins for

museum specimens and the meat to augment their food supply. Christmas, 1914, aboard ALASKA was a quiet one, with the major event, the "big feed", being attended by the crew and fourteen Eskimos. On December 31, ALASKA's winter crew went out on deck at midnight to see the New Year in according to the ancient custom and so ended ALASKA's second year with the Canadian Arctic Expedition.

NOTE: The next edition of THE BULLETIN will cover ALASKA's summer trips between Herschel Island and Bernard Harbour and the eventful final voyage out to Nome.

Of time and men

by J.A.D. Walsh

Recent editions of the BULLETIN have presented a fine collection of material for the Captain James Cook Bicentennial. One article aptly put the stage of events related to Cook in broader perspective by showing that while Cook was undoubtedly the leader, he was fortunate in having many able men to lead. Among them were some whose names were subsequently made famous by force of circumstances. They were also names, now forgotten, of other men of Cook's time who played necessary parts.

To broaden even further the perspective of Cook's successes, let us conjure up the picture of Cook's two ships, RESOLUTION and DISCOVERY, anchored in Resolution Cove, Nootka Sound. They lie peacefully, sails furled and the feeling is conveyed of a thankful rest and shelter in a safe haven; the any port in a storm.

Consider for a moment what lay behind, historically speaking the safe arrival of the ships in that quiet cove. The ships themselves owed their shape, size and seaworthiness to an earlier period; the times of King Charles II and Samuel Pepys--the age of Naval architecture, of basic design from unplanked models and building towards a then unforseen age of discovery to follow some hundred years after. Too, the presence of the ships in that remote cove was due in some measure to the founding of the Royal Greenwich Observatory in 1675 by charter of Charles II; "to find out the so-much desired longitude at sea, for perfecting of the art of navigation".

Ship design and building and royal charters do not of themselves create scientific advances. The requisite is the inventive genius of the human mind. The products of one such genius were to greatly affect the successes of James Cook in his wanderings about an ocean still largely uncharted and unknown.

In May, 1693, in the village of Foulby (not Foul-Bay), in the parish of Wragby, Yorkshire, England, a son, John, was born to a local carpenter named Harrison. By the time John Harrison was 22 years of age he had acquired sufficient knowledge to repair and construct clocks; one existing today in which all the wheels except the escape wheel are made of wood. In 1714 a Board of Longitude was established in England for the purpose of supervising competition for rewards offered by the government for the invention and development of an accurate timepiece suitable for use at sea. The top award offered was £20,000. Harrison was to win that award in 1772, having been granted half of the top prize in 1765 by a niggling Board of Longitude that

finally required the full force of King George III's support of Harrison to pay the remainder seven years later.

John Harrison devoted virtually his whole life to the invention, development and perfection of the first suitable marine chronometer. He produced four timekeepers for trial by the Board of Longitude and the Admiralty. A copy of his Fourth timepiece made by Larcum Kendall at the Board of Longitude's direction was carried by James Cook on his second and third voyages in the Pacific.

This timekeeper, called K1, was made in 1769 by Larcum Kendall, London, and is a close copy of Harrison's No. 4. Harrison freely admitted that it surpassed its prototype. K1 first underwent satisfactory trials at Greenwich and was then sent to sea with Commander Cook in HMS RESOLUTION on the second voyage in which he was the first to cross the Antarctic Circle. With the alternations of dead calm and furious gales, tropical heat and extreme cold, the voyage constituted as severe a test of this "newfangled timekeeper" -- compared to the old hour-glass -- as could be imagined. To quote Lieutenant-Commander R.T. Gould, RN (Retired), author and authority on marine timekeepers, "Yet so well did K1 perform, and so accurate was its going throughout the three years' voyage, that Cook the most exact and least enthusiastic of men, had nothing but praise for it, and made a special point of taking it with him again, on loan from the Board (of Longitude) in his last voyage in 1776". 1776 was the year of John Harrison's death; the man who made exact navigation a possibility.

The following quotes from Cook's manuscript journal attest to his high opinion of the timekeeper he carried in RESOLUTION for trial purposes:

". . . Mr. Kendall's watch had answered beyond all expectations, by pointing out the Longitude of this place (Cape of Good Hope, October, 1772) to one minute of time to what it was observed by Messrs. Mason and Dixon in 1761". Elsewhere, Cook speaks of "Our trusty guide, the Watch", and "our never failing guide, the Watch". The concluding passage of the journal (the Admiralty copy stops at the Cape) runs as follows: "On our making the land of the Cape, the error of Mr. Kendall's watch was no more than 18′ of longitude . . . It would not be doing justice to Mr. Harrison and Mr. Kendall if I did not own that we have received very great assistance from this useful and valuable time piece as will more fully appear in the course of this journal."

The development of the timekeeper or chronometer proceeded until virtually no seagoing vessel sailed any distance without one. Further scientific development may supersede the ticking mechanism, however accurate its measurement of the passage of time. Radio time signals bouncing from satellites in space, atomic clocks capable of dividing time into infinitesmal units far exceed John Harrison's first cumbersome mechanisms in accuracy. But to this man goes the credit for the first workable mechanisms which made vast improvements in the accuracy of navigation possible.

Everyone remembers Captain James Cook . . . but the name of contemporary John Harrison is virtually unknown. An example of how names forgotten to history also make their contribution.

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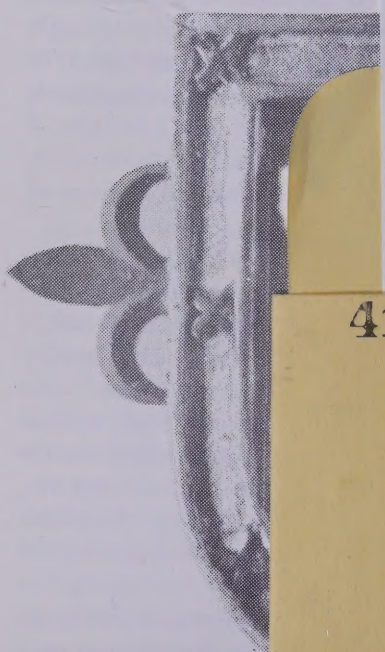

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